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## *J.I.R.B.: Focusing on Pennsylvania's Judiciary*

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On March 6, 1984, the Pennsylvania Crime Commission passed a resolution authorizing an investigation into the "manner in which officials and/or employees of the Judicial Inquiry and Review Board (J.I.R.B.) conduct the business of the Board."

Pursuant to the Constitution and laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the J.I.R.B. has the responsibility to examine the conduct of justices and judges. It is empowered to conduct investigations and to hold hearings concerning their suspension, removal, discipline or compulsory retirement.

This investigation was initiated in part when in 1983 the Commission became aware of testimony given before the J.I.R.B. regarding the board's investigation of Supreme Court Justice Rolf Larsen. The testimony raised serious questions regarding misconduct, public corruption and criminality by public officials and others.

The testimony and other information and evidence obtained by the Commission also raised serious questions regarding the manner in which any and all complaints against justices and judges are submitted to, evaluated, investigated, heard and determined (preliminarily and formally) by the J.I.R.B.

As a result of the above information, the Crime Commission initiated a statewide investigation which examined conflicts of interest, violations of canons of ethics, criminality and other irregularities concerning the manner in which the J.I.R.B. conducted its business.

After the Commission initiated the investigation it received additional information alleging judicial misconduct at nearly all levels of the judicial system.

These allegations were received from individuals involved in court administration, law enforcement and the legal community. As a result of this information, several areas of serious concern have been uncovered and are currently being investigated. Additional significant information regarding J.I.R.B. procedure was received from former and current J.I.R.B. members.

Concurrent with the Commission's investigation, other groups and individuals voiced concern about the performance of the J.I.R.B.

In November of 1984 the Special Senate Committee on Judicial Conduct and Administration (also known as the Resolution 54 Committee) chaired by Senator Richard A. Snyder issued a report titled, "The Image of Justice."

In it, Sen. Snyder quotes former Chief Justice Richard Neeley of West Virginia:

*"In the judiciary the appearance of impropriety is as reprehensible as the real thing."* Snyder adds that many of the problems detailed by the Committee's work, "give rise to a suspicion of impropriety and, if we do nothing, we will greatly harm the image of justice in Pennsylvania and ultimately endanger justice itself."

